

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3358

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 1656

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PN, CO, CS,

SUBJECT: MARCH 22-24 PRESIDENTS' MEETING IN PANAMA--ATMOSPHERE

AND EXPECTATIONS

SUMMARY: QUADRAPARTITE CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING HERE
MARCH 22-24 IS BEING PLAYED AS MAJOR EVENT, WITH STRONG
SUPPORT FOR GOP'S CANAL TREATY POSITION THE PRINCIPAL
ANTICIPATED OUTCOME FOR PANAMA. IN ADDITION TO CANAL
QUESTION, DISCUSSIONS WILL REPORTEDLY COVER OAS REFORMS,
CUBAN SANCTIONS, U.S. TRADE ACT, CA/CARIBBEAN MERCHANT
FLEET PROPOSAL, CREATION OF SELA, AND CERTAIN BILATERAL
ISSUES. U.S. CAN EXPECT TO TAKE ITS LUMPS ON THE TRADE
ACT AND SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR STATEMENT ON CANAL ISSUE
SOMEWHAT BEYOND MERE ENDORSEMENT OF PANAMANIAN ASPIRATIONS.
CONCEPTUAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND PANAMA ON
URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY QUESTION ALSO APPEARS POSSIBLE.
AS A SIDE ATTRACTION OF SORTS, PRESS
MARCH 21 HAS CARRIED AP REPORT FROM BOGOTA
THAT CUBAN FOREIGN MINISTER ROA WILL BE IN PANAMA
MARCH 23 TO CONFER WITH COLOMBIAN COUNTERPART. END SUMMARY

1. BUILD-UP OF AND PREPARATIONS FOR MARCH 22-24 MEET-

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ING OF COLOMBIAN, VENEZUELAN, COSTA RICAN AND PANAMANIAN

CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT HAVE GROWN INCREASINGLY INTENSE WITH APPROACH OF CONCLAVE. LOCAL MEDIA, AS WOULD BE EXPECTED, HAVE BEEN TOUTING MEETING EXTENSIVELY, BOTH EDITORIALY AND IN FEATURE ARTICLES.

2. PRINCIPAL THRUST OF EDITORIAL COMMENTARY PREDICTABLY HAS FOCUSSED ON PRESTIGE ACCRUING TO PANAMA AS HOST AND, MORE SPECIFICALLY, ON ANTICIPATED ENDORSEMENT OF PANAMA'S CANAL ASPIRATIONS. AS THE GOP-CONTROLLED MATUTINO PUT IT IN ITS MARCH 16 EDITORIAL, THE "SUMMIT" MEETING WILL AGAIN PROVIDE A FORUM FOR INTERNATIONAL CONDEMNATION OF THE 1903 TREATY AND SUPPORT FOR PANAMA'S POSITION. WHILE OTHER AGENDA ITEMS ARE ALSO VIEWED AS IMPORTANT, THE CANAL QUESTION IS REGARDED AS PRINCIPAL TOPIC AND PANAMA'S INTEREST IS CLEARLY CENTERED ON MEETING'S REINFORCEMENT OF HEMISPHERIC SOLIDERITY WITH GOP ON THE CANAL ISSUE. GENERAL TORRIJOS, GOING BEYOND PREDICTING ONLY AN ENDORSEMENT, STRONGLY IMPLIED IN HIS MARCH 16 SPEECH AT RIO HATO THAT THE PARTICIPANTS WOULD ALSO PASS JUDGMENT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS.

3. THE MEDIA, REFLECTING GOP DESIRE THAT EVENT BE A MAJOR ONE, ALSO URGED LARGE AND ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION, FEATURED BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON VISITORS, ESPECIALLY PRESIDENT PEREZ, AND HAS GIVEN HEAVY COVERAGE TO REPORTING ON MEETING AGENDA FROM OTHER THREE CAPITALS. OFFICIAL PROGRAM FOR MEETING CONSISTS OF ARRIVAL CEREMONIES AND RECEPTION HOSTED BY PRESIDENT LAKAS MARCH 22, ALL-DAY WORKING SESSION WITH GENERAL TORRIJOS ON CONTADORA ISLAND MARCH 23, AND SIGNING OF "DECLARATION OF PANAMA" IN TELEVISED CEREMONY MORNING OF MARCH 24. REMAINDER OF PROGRAM IS LIMITED TO WREATH LAYING AT BOLIVAR MONUMENT AND VISIT TO SALON BOLIVAR, AND RETURN LUNCHEON FOR LAKAS AND TORRIJOS HOSTED BY VISITING PRESIDENTS.

4. ASIDE FROM THE CANAL ISSUE, SUBSTANTIVE AGENDA, WHICH HAS NOT BEEN OFFICIALLY PUBLISHED, WILL REPORTEDLY COVER OAS REFORMS, CUBAN SANCTIONS, U.S. TRADE ACT, CREATION OF SELA, PROPOSED CENTRAL AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

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MERCHANT FLEET AND OTHER BILATERAL ISSUES, MOST IMPORTANTLY THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY QUESTION BETWEEN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA.

5. ADDING TO THE AFFAIR'S NEWSWORTHINESS, ALTHOUGH APPARENTLY NOT PART OF THE MAIN EVENT, AN AP ITEM FROM BOGOTA CARRIED HERE MARCH 21 REPORTED THAT CUBAN FOREIGN MINISTER RAUL ROA WILL TRAVEL TO PANAMA MARCH 23

TO MEET WITH COLOMBIAN FOREIGN MINISTER LIEVANO AGUIRRE. REPORT NOTED THAT COLOMBIA RECENTLY RE-ESTABLISHED RELATIONS WITH CUBA BUT HAD NO INFORMATION ON WHAT MATTERS WOULD BE DISCUSSED. SOME TIME AGO, WHEN POSSIBILITY OF OTHER JOINING IN PRESIDENTS' MEETING WAS RAISED, FOREIGN MINISTER TACK STATED ATTENDANCE WOULD BE LIMITED TO FOUR ORIGINAL PARTICIPANTS.

6. COMMENT: QUADRIPARTITE CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IS LARGEST HIGH-LEVEL GATHERING IN PANAMA SINCE THE MARCH 1973 UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING, AND IT IS CLEARLY IMPORTANT TO TORRIJOS AND THE GOP. WHILE PROGRESS IN THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS, AND THE GOP'S FIRM COMMITMENT TO AND CONTINUED CONFIDENCE IN THEM, WILL BE REFLECTED IN THE COMMUNIQUE, WE WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO ANTICIPATE SOMETHING BEYOND A SIMPLE REAFFIRMATION OF SUPPORT FOR PANAMA. WITH REGARD TO OTHER ITEMS ON AGENDA, WE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY TAKE OUR LUMPS ON THE TRADE ACT. ON THE URRUTIA-THOMSON TREATY QUESTION, A PRINCIPAL REASON FOR THE CONCLAVE, CONCEPTUAL RESOLUTION OF THE MATTER BETWEEN PANAMA AND COLOMBIA, WITH COSTA RICA AND VENEZUELA LENDING THEIR GOOD OFFICES, APPEARS POSSIBLE. STATEMENTS BY COLOMBIAN OFFICIAL THAT GOC HAS CHOSEN TO SETTLE ISSUE DIRECTLY WITH GOP, AND TORRIJOS' REMARK MARCH 16 THAT AN AGREEMENT WAS NEAR, ARE PUBLIC SIGNALS THAT A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT MAY BE REACHED, IF NOT ANNOUNCED.

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